Story by Emily Baker

# MANAGING SOLUTIONS

*Institute's managers coordinate water quality, quantity projects*

Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI) project managers work together with scientists and educators as well as government funding agencies to address water quality and quantity issues in Texas.

Each of TWRI's five project managers administers several projects, coordinating meetings, administering budgets, monitoring research and ensuring that deadlines are met.

One of the project managers' primary functions is to align interested research scientists from the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station and other universities and Texas Cooperative Extension specialists and agents with funding agencies, a process that most commonly occurs in one of three ways.

"Project managers will monitor funding agencies to keep track of who has funding and for what projects," said Lucas Gregory. "Once we've determined who has funding, a project manager will call a researcher or specialist and see if his or her research or education ideas fit with the agency's funding. Or, a researcher or specialist will contact TWRI, and we'll start talking to different agencies to see if the person and the agency can collaborate based on his or her interests. Finally, some agencies come to TWRI with funding, and we develop a project to use the funds."

Gregory began his role at TWRI in 2006 upon completion of a master's degree in water management and hydrological science at Texas A&M University. A former Mills Scholar, Gregory was familiar with TWRI. He saw that the institute complemented his educational interests, and he now manages several 319(h)-funded projects that work to resolve nonpoint source pollution issues in collaboration with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Texas

Arroyo Colorado.

State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB). These projects include Buck Creek Water Quality, which consists of two projects; Pecos River Watershed Protection and New Technologies for Animal Waste Pollution Control.

He also manages two federal initiative projects—Water Quality Program for Lake Granbury, Texas, funded by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Environmental Infrastructures for the North Bosque River, funded by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and DOE; a NRCS-funded Conservation Innovation Grant—Assembly and Testing of an On-Farm Manure to Energy Conversion BMP for Animal Waste Pollution Control; and a Caddo Lake project.

Gregory said that it is vital for researchers, Extension specialists and funding agencies to develop a working rapport with each other in order to best form a symbiotic partnership.

"Establishing relationships with people is the key," he said. "The more people you know, the more you can connect researchers and funding agencies. Meeting people and communicating what we do is the biggest piece of the pie."

Project Manager Cecilia Wagner agreed.

"New projects, new funding and new issues come up all the time—knowing different researchers and specialists and knowing their expertise is our job," Wagner said, who began her second stint at TWRI in 2006.

Wagner said project managers produce a number of deliverables depending on the project. These items may include newsletters, budgetary items or reports.

"The researchers conduct the work, and we serve as liaisons between them and funding agencies," she said. "We let the scientists or specialists do their job without letting the red tape get in the way. Grant funding is a competitive world; we want to get funds in, and just as quickly hand them out. We don't care whose name is on the reports and projects, rather we want to solve water-related problems."

She manages four Arroyo Colorado projects funded by EPA through TSSWCB and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and Texas Water

Project Managers Cecilia Wagner, Kevin Wagner, Danielle Supercinski, Dr. Bill Fox and Lucas Gregory work to link university researchers and Extension specialists to appropriate funding agencies to provide research-derived, science-based information to help answer diverse water questions addressing Texas' water quality and water quantity issues.

Development Board-funded projects—Irrigation Training Program and Precision Irrigators Network.

Kevin Wagner, who joined TWRI in 2005 from TSSWCB, has spent several years working with environmental issues. He is currently pursuing his doctorate evaluating best management practices for reducing bacterial runoff from cattle wastes entering streams. Wagner manages four bacteria-related TWRI projects: Environmental Management of Grazing Lands and a Conservation Innovation Grant Bacteria Runoff BMPs for Intensive Beef Cattle Operations, both funded by NRCS; and TSSWCB-funded projects—Lone Star Healthy Streams and Education Program for Improved Water Quality in Copano Bay.

Wagner recommends that researchers and specialists contact project managers with their research ideas so that collaboration is possible.

"We tell researchers and specialists who are not familiar with TWRI to come visit with us about a project idea and we'll work out a scope of work and look for places to submit the idea, and we'll refine it depending on the grant we're looking to get," Wagner said. "The most important thing is to get something on paper before we take that first step."

As project manager for the Rio Grande Basin Initiative (RGBI), Danielle Supercinski has been successful in documenting the project's outcomes. She works with researchers and Extension specialists and agents, helping pull together reports, publications, news articles, an annual accomplishment report and other project-related materials and reporting.

"I put together an annual progress and accomplishments report for the project that is almost 100 pages of project outcomes—water savings, money savings and collaborative efforts," Supercinski said. "The report is given to project participants as well as officials in Washington to show that we are saving water, producing results and doing what we are getting funded to do."

Dr. B.L. Harris, RGBI project director and TWRI associate director, said, "Documenting results and outcomes is important to any project and RGBI serves as a model program of outcomes, focused on water conservation accountability."

RGBI is a joint project between Texas and New Mexico Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension, and is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service. This partnership, along with numerous other agency, organization and university collaborations, minimizes duplication of efforts and produces greater outcomes because of everyone working together.

"Collaboration has produced numerous accomplishments because these researchers and Extension specialists and agents are working toward the common goal of conserving water," Supercinski said. "Since the inception of the project in 2001, more than 2.8 million acre-feet of water have been saved. Through continued project efforts, even more water savings can be accomplished through RGBI and other water conservation projects, providing water supplies to meet current and future water demands."

Another example of the importance of project partnership is the Fort Hood Range Revegetation Pilot project. Dr. Bill Fox, senior research scientist and manager for this project, has served as the liaison among the project's partners: the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Army, NRCS and the Experiment Station including Blackland Agricultural Research and Extension Center and TWRI in the NRCS-funded four-year project. The success of this project has led to an increase in Fort Hood's military construction budgets for a more widespread application of best management practices to control erosion, he said. Fox is also involved in project and federal initiative development.

"This project is working to restore the training lands of the military installation by developing and implementing best management practices and decision support tools," Fox said, who conducts research for the project. "Everyone agrees that improving training conditions for U.S. Army soldiers is the number one accomplishment of the project. I am glad TWRI can be a part of it."